



Press Release



Congressman John Conyers, Jr.
Michigan, 14th District
Ranking Member, U.S. House Judiciary
Committee

Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

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For Immediate Release:
March 10, 2005

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Conyers Requests Investigation of ChoicePoint Contracts

Leads Bipartisan Effort to Probe Government Reliance on
Commercial Database Providers

Representative John Conyers, Jr., (D-MI) House Judiciary Committee Ranking Member, was joined today by Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner, Constitution Subcommittee Chairman Steve Chabot, and Constitution Subcommittee Ranking Member Jarold Nadler in requesting that the General Accounting Office investigate issues arising from the federal government's reliance on ChoicePoint and other commercially available databases to provide information for use by law enforcement and in other important domestic functions. The text of the letter sent to the GAO follows:

"We are writing to request that the General Accounting Office investigate issues arising from the federal government's reliance on and contributions to commercially available databases to provide information for use by law enforcement and in other important domestic functions. Specifically, we request an investigation of the legality of data acquisition, verification, and security procedures and the overall magnitude of government contracts with ChoicePoint Inc. and similar database companies.

In April, 2001, the Wall Street Journal reported that ChoicePoint provided personal information to at least thirty-five government agencies and was the largest of the data suppliers. The accuracy of such data being relied upon by federal agencies must be of the highest caliber. Accurate data enhances national security, while inaccurate data can be both dangerous and personally destructive. In fact, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) relied on erroneous private contractor data in hiring personnel to secure our nation's airports and, as a result, failed to flag background issues with 161 of 504 applicants to the air marshal program.

As private firms participate in the modernization of routine security checks, such as those at our nation's airports, the security procedures employed by private data miners merit close scrutiny. This month, ChoicePoint disclosed that thieves may have stolen the personal data of more than 35,000 people in the state of California and up to 145,000 people nationwide. Before this information became public, however, TSA announced a pilot program for privatization of the "registered traveler" program at Orlando International Airport involving Verified Identity Pass, Inc., a partner of ChoicePoint. For a fee, frequent fliers would disclose personal information to a Verified Identity database for faster clearance through airport security.

We are concerned about the government's reliance on, and possible contributions to, private contractors that may not have accurate or secure data, especially as it relates to the role these companies play in providing data for law enforcement and national security decision-making. For these reasons, we request that the GAO examine and report on the following:

- (1) the contracts between commercial data suppliers and any federal agency, the variety of information supplied, including the form of the information (e.g, website), the term and compensation arrangements;
- (2) the guidelines of the federal agencies governing the use and acquisition of personal information from commercial data suppliers and all oversight, quality control, or verification procedures for said data (including assessments on the quality of commercial databases); and
- (3) internal data acquisition guidelines, quality controls, oversight, and security procedures used by the commercial data suppliers."